CHAPTER-I

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There are different ways of looking at a work of art. While some formalist critics approach a work of art as something which stands independent of the author and is detached from the environing world, some critics in the tradition of Wordsworth would regard a work as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (qtd. in Habib, 438) and the work would be seen as a direct expression of the feelings and emotions of the writer himself. There are also some critics who would try to see the reflection of social realities in the work of art. This idea of studying works of literature as products of social, geographical and climatic conditions is quite old and has received a good deal of emphasis in modern criticism. Some kind of information and understanding of the social world can certainly be drawn from literature. H.A.Taine has rightly observed that “a literary work is not mere individual play of imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners” (Taine 309). The relation of art to society is vitally significant. David Daiches in his Critical Approaches to Literature remarks: “In modern criticism investigation of a writer’s social origins and of the effect which social factors had on his work, has been at least as common as psychological studies of a writer’s mind, and the two have often gone together” (Daiches 358).

Critics such as Jaidipsinh Dodiya, Nandini Bhautoo Dewnarain, Anjali Gera Roy and Meena T. Pillai have enquired into the social factors affecting the attitudes of Rohinton Mistry, thus seeking sociological causes of psychological phenomena and seeing art as an expression of the writer’s psychology and attitudes as formed by the social conditions in which he lived.

It is a fact that literature reflects the tendencies of the age in which it is written and some writers can easily be regarded as representative figures through whose works the spirit of the age
finds an expression. In their writings they give voice to the feelings and emotions, fears and doubts, hopes and aspirations of their times. Even if the writer is exceptionally individualistic, he cannot help showing, in his works, the influence of the social environment in which he has grown because his own personality has been moulded by the main currents of life around him.

“Every man belongs to his race and age, no matter how marked his personality, the spirit of his race and age finds an expression through him” (Hudson 5) and a work of art, no matter how much it rejects or ignores the social realities, is deeply rooted within them. Roy Harvey Pearce has rightly argued that a critic should not only see literature in history but history in literature as well. Literature is thus considered the expression of the society which produced it. In fact, one of the best ways of understanding a particular age is to attend to the contents of the works of literature produced during the period.

A proper understanding of any literary work requires, among other things, an adequate knowledge of the age in which the work is written. Familiarity with the historical and social context is necessary for a better evaluation of a work of art because the work is not created in vacuum and the writer is influenced by the atmosphere and the main currents of his age. As most works of literature hold a mirror to the society of the time, it is not easy to catch the true spirit of the work unless we have an adequate knowledge of the period in which the writer lived.

Most of the writers reflect an awareness of their social environment and this is particularly true of the Indian novelists. Consciously devoted to the narration of nation, the earliest Indian novels were written in Bengali and they reflected social and political realism. While raising his voice against caste system and Zamindari system, Rabindra Nath Tagore, the most outstanding name in modern Bengali literature, dealt with social, political and economic problems of the country. The problems of widows and the clash of old and new taken up by Tagore were important issues of that period. Like Tagore, Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra
artistically presented the ‘calm’ as well as the ‘storms’ of everyday Bengali life. Whereas Sarat Chandra and Tagore dealt with contemporary issues in Bengali, the credit of ushering in social realism in Hindi goes to Prem Chand.

Social conditions are said to have given rise to the novel in Indian languages and exactly the parallel trends were observed in the Indian English novel because the Indian novel became immensely popular and paved the way for the choice of themes for Indian novelists writing in English. It is important to note that the Indo-Anglian novel written up to 1920s does not display much historic sense but it gradually gathered confidence and established itself and responded to the contemporary society with a greater sense of commitment. In the period between 1940s and 1970s, the Indian novel written in English acquired its distinctive character. The famous trio of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao who belong to the first half of the 20th Century were always concerned with national and social issues. The froth on the surface as well as the unplumbed depths of Indian life have been presented by them. These novelists boldly raised their voice against the evils of the society of that time. The tragedy, poverty, corruption, misery and the issues related to the subaltern sections of society were articulated in these novels. Being conscious of social realities of their times, these first generation of Indian English writers could not afford to ignore the issues of freedom struggle and Gandhian ideology in their novels. A direct engagement with politico-historical events may not be evident in their novels but an awareness of historical forces and events is easily comprehended. They are the novels written about India by Indians.

The writers like Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgaonkar and Chaman Nahal who belong to the second generation of novelists have successfully showcased various aspects of the new nation. The choice of a specific locale, the particular period of time and the use of historical events and characters make their narration of the nation more political. These novels written in
post-independence period between 1950s and 1970s are also known for their shift from the rural to the urban India. Anita Desai and Ruth Jhabwala are the representative women novelists of this phase.

When we enter the world of Indian English novelists of 1980s and 1990s, we find that a distinctive engagement with history becomes very common. Almost every major novelist of this period seeks to register and to comprehend not only the impact of urbanization and industrialization but also the effect of other forces of modernity on society and on individuals. The novels written by Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth and Rohinton Mistry belong to this category. Most of these writers rejected the traditional techniques of novel writing and adopted new practices. Because of their bold experiments and by their own proclamations, they are known as postcolonial Indian Writers. Being the products of an urban Indian World, these novelists, who emerged on literary scene in the last phase of 20th Century, are all concerned with the portrayal of Indian urban society after Independence. Since it is “impossible to write a good novel today that remains suspended out of time and space; it must have a definite location in temporal and spatial reality” (Mukherjee 29), the postcolonial Indian English writers have given us the very reality of contemporary life. It can be safely asserted that issues confronting the country are not being discussed so much in our parliamentary debates, as by our novelists.

Rohinton Mistry is no exception to this general tendency among the post colonial novelists to act as historians. He gives an authentic picture of life as it was actually being lived in the period mentioned by him and addresses vital issues of post-independence urban society not only because he was born and brought up in such society which was changing rapidly before his eyes but also because he was particularly responsive to the changes brought about by the independence of the country. He wants to map out, through his fiction, not only the changes in
society but also the stress which is an unavoidable part of social change. He responds to the contemporary society with a sense of commitment and creates an authentic world of human experience. The socio-political transformation of the country and the changing equations of relationships leading to tension and suffocation find detailed expression in his works. He also deals with the collapse of traditional values leading to extreme individualism. Although “the author was made invisible by New Criticism” (Dahiya 6), no one can ignore the fact that the creator cannot be ignored while evaluating his creation. So it makes sense to have a brief look at the life of Rohinton Mistry in order to grasp the proper gist of his writing.

One of the important writers of post-independence Parsi fiction, Rohinton Mistry was born on 3 July 1952 to Behram Mistry and Freny Jhaveri Mistry in Bombay. His younger brother, Cyrus Mistry is a playwright and a short story writer. His mother, like most mothers portrayed in his Tales from Firozsha Baag, was a home maker, while his father was associated with the field of advertising. Rohinton was lucky enough to get the opportunity of studying in Villa Theresa Primary School and then in St. Xavier’s High School, the two prestigious institutions of the city.

The talent for writing was exhibited quite early, when as a student of 5th Standard, Rohinton wrote a story about a cricket bat, “The Autobiography of a Cricket Bat”. After graduating with a degree in Mathematics from the University of Bombay in 1974, Mistry migrated to Canada in 1975 where he married Freny Elavia who was a student of the same college where Mistry had studied.

Rohinton Mistry had the talent and taste for music and initially he wanted to make a career in music in Canada. He joined the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce as a clerk and accountant in 1975. A part-time student of English literature and philosophy at the University of Toronto, Mistry got his second bachelor’s degree in 1982. For twenty years Mistry lived in
Brampton, a suburb of Toronto. The materialistically comfortable and quiet existence in Canada has continued even after a lot of international fame and recognition.

Often compared to great 19th Century novelist Charles Dickens, Mistry wrote his first short story, “One Sunday” in 1983 which won the Hart House Prize that year at the literary contest of the University of Toronto. He won the same award for his short story “Lend me your Light” in 1984. The following year i.e. in 1985 he won the contributor’s award of Canadian fiction. Now many publishers were interested in publishing the collection of Mistry’s short stories and Tales from Firozsha Baag was published by Penguin Canada in 1987. In Britain and USA, the short-story collection was published under the title Swimming Lessons and other Stories from Firozsha Baag. Short listed for Canadian Governor General’s Award, the book established Mistry as a popular writer with great talent who could create extraordinarily interesting world of human experience from seemingly insignificant lives.

Such a Long Journey, the first novel by Mistry, came out in 1991 that won many awards and was shortlisted for the Trillium Award and the prestigious Booker Prize. Mistry won the Governor General’s award and the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for the best book. Published in 1995, written with compassion, humour and insight, A Fine Balance was also short listed for the Booker Prize. It won the Governor General’s Award and the Giller Prize. The novel also won the Royal Society of Literature’s Winfried Holtby Prize and the 1996 Los Angeles Times Award for fiction. It became so popular with the reading public that it was selected by the talk Show Queen Oprah Winfrey as the book of the month in 2001 – yet another feather in Mistry’s cap.

When his third novel Family Matters was published in 2002, Mistry was already so well established as a great novelist of our times that the novel was an instant hit. Mistry won Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize in 2002, the Canadian Writers Association Award for Fiction
in 2003 and the Timothy Findley Award in 2006 for this novel. *Family Matters* was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2002.

Mistry’s younger brother Cyrus influenced Rohinton greatly. It was Cyrus who introduced him to the world of books while they were still in Bombay and the suggestion for choosing Bombay as the fictional locale also came from Cyrus only. Not that Mistry is averse to writing about the country where he is living since 1975, but city of his birth lures him. In fact, it is not any aversion that stops Mistry from writing about Canada, it is the love for the place where he was born, spent his childhood and young age that makes him set most of his works in Bombay. The physical distance from Bombay and the sense of being away from his community compels him to choose characters from Parsi community and make Bombay the fictional locale. It is generally argued that the migrant writers are forced to write about their homeland because they feel a sense of loss of home and roots. The physical distance compels many emigrants to undertake a ‘literary journey’ back home. Not only Rohinton Mistry, but most of the diasporic writers remember the past and write about their homeland. Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukherjee, Uma Prameshwaran, M.G.Vassanji and Firdaus Kanga all belong to this category who have migrated to different countries in the West but continue to write about India. In an interview that was published in Times of India on 27 October 1996, when Mistry was asked as to why India continues to engage his imagination, he had remarked:

> It is very naive to assume that you leave a place and you go to a new country and you start a new life and it is a new chapter – It is not. Canada is the middle of the book. At some time you have to write the beginning. (qtd. in Baxi, 130)

Critics often try to prove that the migrant writers are compelled to write about the land of their birth because they are nostalgic or tormented by a sense of guilt for having left it and that is the reason why a streak of nostalgia is always found in immigrant fiction. Mistry, however, does
not believe in any such theory. For him, writing about the country of his birth is no sign of any
guilt or disconttent or nostalgia, but “simply a journey back to the beginning, to the roots”
(Supriya 77). The detailed description of various aspects of life in Bombay that fills the pages of
the books written by Mistry prove that he is very sensitive, very observant and has kept the
memory of his country alive. The views and opinions expressed by Mistry in his non-fictional
writings and the interviews are undeniably of great relevance for the study of his works.

It is often argued by some critics that the emigrant writer, being distanced spatially,
recreates the homeland from his memory. Since the authenticity of memory can always be
questioned, it automatically puts a question mark on the authenticity of portrayal. This, however,
is not true. Distance does not affect the aesthetics of composition. No doubt, the emigrant is
denied the immediacy of experience, but the distant view of his homeland helps the writer see it
as it really is. The distance enhances the aesthetics of composition and adds to the objectivity of
the writer’s view. Migration, thus lends a new perspective to reality.

It is generally assumed that being the product of a commercial world, the diasporic
writers are more interested in the ‘sales’ of their books. Having this aim in their mind, they
make promotional appearances and sign contracts for their next books, yet to be written. Their
interest in attending literary functions puts a question mark on their genuine concern towards the
narration of their nation. Moreover, it is felt that they cannot afford to ignore that their
readership is not confined to India only and the western readers have known our country from a
western perspective. Keeping the international readers in their mind, these writers give an
English, an American or a European view of India and Indians and generally portray the ‘dark’
India rather than the real India. It is generally believed that they can only cater to the need of
English readers or mediocre Indian readers. In a Keynote Address at a national seminar on
“Commitment in Postcolonial Literature and Theory: A conceptual study” organized by KVM
college, Karnal on 18 February 2012, Dr. Bhim S. Dahiya raised the issue of commitment of these writers who are living in foreign countries and write about India. Dr. Dahiya labelled them as ‘distant relatives of Indian realities’ who have created fabulous fictions about our country but having very little relevance for the native Indians. The critic feels that the diasporic writers have been able to grab national and international awards through their fiction but they lack commitment to any political ideology and they don’t write the “fiction of India for the Indians” since they are not rooted in the soil of their country.

Although there is not an iota of doubt that many of these modern diasporic writers lack the intensity and authenticity of great Indian writers like Tagore, Sarat Chandra, Mulk Raj Anand, and R.K.Narayan, but some of them definitely deserve serious consideration for they enrich our experience of life and promote the sense of right and wrong which is the job of all good literature and Rohinton Mistry is one such writer. He writes about the people, the places and the situations of the land where he was born, grew up and spent 23 years of his life before he emigrated. He writes about Bombay of the 1960s and the 1970s he had experienced firsthand. Through his Parsi characters, he has taken up some very sensitive issues confronting our country, and Bombay, the chosen fictional locale, always becomes a metaphor, a microcosm for India. Set in the post-independence era, Mistry’s fictional world suitably charts out the transformation of Bombay into Mumbai.

Mistry left India in 1975 when Indira Gandhi imposed Internal Emergency. So deep was the scar of this political decision that Emergency forms the backdrop of two of his novels – *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*. The third novel *Family Matters* depicts the Shiv Sena Menace in Bombay and the situation after Indira Gandhi was assassinated. Not only the splendor of Bombay he grew up in but also the decay is documented vividly by the writer. The details given in each work refer directly or by implication to the contemporary environment.
Being a Parsi writer, he takes up Parsi characters and the Parsi world to portray the post independence urban world. Like Bapsi Sidhwa, Firdaus Kanga, Meher Pestonji, Dina Mehta and Boman Desai, Mistry also gives detailed description of the life style of Parsis, their rites and rituals, their traditions and customs in his works. After reading his short stories and novels we get a peep into the mindset of the Parsi people who have always been eager to remain a closed ethnic group and want to preserve their culture and religion at every cost. Like a thorough realist, Mistry is all praise for the distinguished traits of the Parsis but also satirizes their love for money and practical considerations. The Parsis’ sincerity and hardworking nature, their extraordinary spirit for mobilizing human resource, their business sense and their reputation for honesty, everything has been discussed at length. The anglophilia, the love for money and some idiosyncrasies of the community are also commented upon. The western tastes of the Parsis, their faith in democratic values and their preference for Bombay makes them the most urbanized and westernized community of the country, asserts the novelist at many places. Though he talks about the secondary status of women in the patriarchal society of India, he seems to boast of the better position of women in his community.

As the Parsis were accorded a special status under the British Raj as compared to the other classes and castes including the dominant Hindus and Muslims, the departure of the British, naturally, engendered a sense of loss in the community. Mistry has thrown sufficient light on the elite status of the Parsis during British period and their sense of being neglected in post-independence India. How Parsis carved a niche for themselves in almost every walk of life, how they take pride in being Parsis and how they distinguished themselves from other Indians in the field of education, business and banking is something Mistry often comments about. It is on account of the characteristic spirit of business, modern attitudes and adaptability that the Parsis could flourish in a country of diverse cultures and religions. Not only does Mistry highlight all
these traits of his community in his fiction, he also brings to the fore the changed social position and frustration of his people after 1947. The continuously declining social position of the Parsis from upper middle income group to middle income group and to various grades of poverty and the immense stress felt by them as a result of this social degradation finds an eloquent expression in Mistry’s fiction. The strict rules followed by the Parsi community to preserve its purity and ethnicity and the change in the attitudes of modern Parsis living in a modern India also captures Mistry’s attention.

It is not only the abiding concern of Rohinton Mistry for Parsi issues but also his sensitivity towards the burning issues confronting our society that makes him an important writer of our times. He, as a creative artist, is known for his realistic portrayal of socio-political issues of present day Indian urban society and this job has been accomplished by him by adopting the traditional form of realism. The advent of magic realism as a narrative mode in the last quarter of the 20th century, marked the exhaustion of the realist form. The modern writers who emerged on the world literary scene after Salman Rushdie made great experiments in the use of narrative techniques and believed that the postmodernist narrative technique is the most appropriate to narrate the complexities of postcolonial societies. However, Mistry does not challenge the classical form of the novel and reasserts its predominance in the telling of his tales.

Mistry’s choice of realism suggests that the postmodernist style is not suitable to the kind of stories he wants to narrate. Because of its power of detail and intensity of engagement, social realism remains the preferred style of Mistry and he has been quite successful in the use of this traditional narrative mode to highlight the social, political, economic and human concerns of his time. It is interesting to note that the writer finds the use of realism not only possible but even indispensable for political and social engagement in post colonial contexts. The complex patterns
of life of modern metros have been very well captured by the novelist by adopting an age old technique.

Ever since Mistry won awards after awards for his fiction and his novels got shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, he made a special place for himself not only among the serious readers but also among the critics and scholars who have studied Mistry’s representation of various aspects of human life in his fiction. However, a brief critical survey of the studies on Rohinton Mistry reveals that he has not been accorded the kind of critical appreciation that is due to him for his contribution to the development of the Indian writing in English which is obvious from the fact that only a few full length studies on his novels are available even after about 30 years of his appearance on the literacy scene. The greater part of criticism on the novelist exists in the form of articles and critical reviews, illuminating only some of the aspects of his art and mind as a novelist. Not only Mistry’s criticism is limited in range and scope, it also suffers from imbalances and distortions in examining the comprehensive sweep of his themes and vision of life.

Most of Mistry’s critics have emphasized either the continuously deepening pessimism of the Parsis in his novels or his preoccupation with the diasporic consciousness. Critics generally read him only as a Parsi novelist highlighting Parsi issues. They generally don’t see his Parsi characters as ordinary common people of India. They have either completely ignored or have not placed due emphasis on Mistry’s depiction of stress of social change in his novels. Although critics like Nilufer E.Bharucha, Anjali Gera Roy and Meena T. Pillai have taken note of Mistry’s concern with the fate and future of urban society and have talked about his knowledge of different aspects of city life, but even they have not fully explored the novelist’s comprehensive view of Indian urban society heading towards a speedy change and the stress associated with this transition. This important aspect of Mistry’s fiction has received only a brief attention in a
general discussion by these critics mentioned above. The present study focuses on Mistry’s understanding of stress of social change because it is felt that there is immense scope for a systematic study of this theme. His works show, in an adequate manner, the maturity and force of Mistry’s treatment of the subject. It will be relevant to mention here that Mistry does not merely repeat himself in the treatment of this important theme but offers a distinctive picture of the changing scene at the different stages of development. A brief look at these critical insights will be imperative for a proper understanding of Mistry as a novelist.

Jaydipsinh Dodiya in *Perspectives on the Novels of Rohinton Mistry* presents a critical analysis of three novels written by Mistry. After discussing the contribution of the Parsis in Indian political and social life, the critic records the achievements of the Parsi writers in the field of literature. In a brief critical survey of prominent Parsi novelists like Boman Desai, Firdaus Kanga, Bapsi Sidhwa and Dina Mehta, Dodiya tries to establish that all “Parsi writers assert their ethnic identity in their creative writing” (27). Dodiya comments that Mistry has emerged as a formidable writer on the world literacy scene who depicts the life of Parsis in India. The critic posits that Mistry has a thorough knowledge of social and political situation of India. As exemplified by *A Fine Balance* which portrays the lives of rural poor and *Family Matters* which takes up the universal issue of family and old age, his works are thoughtful commentaries on the political schemes, corruption and suffering of the middle and poor classes, still they do carry his serious concern for his community. Jaydipsinh Dodiya compares Rohinton Mistry with other Parsi writers and establishes that Mistry is quite sensitive to the various anxieties felt by his community. The critic also talks about the women characters portrayed by Rohinton Mistry. Although Dodiya agrees that politics is discussed in the novels of Mistry, but eventually tries to prove him as a Parsi writer, writing about his Parsi community.
Parsee Novel by V.L.V.N. Narender Kumar begins by the history of Parsis and their escape from Iran and arrival in India and their shift to Bombay. After discussing the westernization and expatriation of the Parsis, the critic also gives information about the Zoroastrian worldview and asserts that Parsi novel in English i.e. novel portraying Parsee life is a potent index of the Zoroastrian ethos. It voices the ambivalence, the nostalgia and the dilemma of the endangered Parsee community. The critic makes a comparative study of the novels written by Parsi novelists like Bapsi Sidhwa, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Boman Desai and Dina Mehta along with Rohinton Mistry and comments: “The Parsees are attempting to assert their ethnic identity in diverse ways and Parsee novel in English reflects this assertion of Parsee identity” (Kumar 11).

The Parsis, according to Narender Kumar, are very different from the dominant Hindu and Muslim communities. Westernized in their approach towards life, they don’t believe in the social systems like satee, purdah and untouchability. The critic also agrees that the Parsis prefer the West since it offers unlimited scope for growth and prosperity. The Parsis cling to their own tradition, custom and language. Their prose is interspersed with Persian words and Gujarati expressions. The Parsis are trying their level best to preserve their ethnic identity at every cost. The critic takes up Such A Long Journey by Rohinton Mistry and tries to locate the typical Parsi features in the novel. An attempt is being made by the critic to prove that the protagonist in the novel is a typical Parsi who demonstrates the Zoroastrian values like charity and benevolence.

Although there is no denying the fact that Mistry offers a vivid glimpse of Parsi life and culture in his fiction and he deals with the lives of Parsi characters in his works, but reading Mistry just as an explicator of the Parsi way of life is to undermine his value as a creative writer. What the critic has ignored is the fact that Parsis are a part and parcel of the Indian Society, living like numerous other castes and classes in our metro cities like Bombay. If we take due
cognizance of the milieu in which the novels are written, we can easily conclude that Mistry attempts to depict the predicament of an ordinary middle class man in the changing Indian urban society in the post independence era through his Parsi characters.

_Rohiton Mistry: Ethnic Enclosures and Transcultural Spaces_ by eminent Parsi critic Nilufer E. Bharucha takes up numerous issues related to the fiction of Rohiton Mistry. Divided into seven chapters, the book takes into notice the backdrop of Mistry’s novels, as two of his novels _Such A Long Journey_ and _A Fine Balance_ showcase the dark days of Emergency. The critic also offers a critical commentary on the various aspects of diaspora, differentiating between the forced diaspora and the voluntary one. The critic strongly feels that diasporic living means living in forced or voluntary exile and hence diasporic writing is bound to reflect problems of living in an alien land. The diasporic people may feel a keen desire to ‘assimilate’ but they also feel “strong links” to their homeland. Nostalgia is a typical feature of the Indian diasporic writing and Mistry’s fiction is no exception. After highlighting the diasporic history of the Parsis, their identification with the ruling class, their contribution in the development of India and their marginalization in decolonized India, the critic comments that the Parsis “feel threatened enough to produce distinctly ethno-religious discourse” (Bharucha 16). The book also attempts to examine Mistry’s choice of locale, his Parsi characters and the relationship of Parsis with the mainstream Hindus. The issue of sentimentality in Mistry’s texts is also touched upon. The book gives an insightful commentary on Mistry’s short stories and novels. The critic is of the view that Mistry portrays the Parsi world quite realistically and the picture of the atrocities of the emergency is also very authentic. Bharucha, however, does not find the rural, lower caste characters of Mistry to be convincing.

In yet another full length study on the writer, _Rohinton Mistry: An Introduction_, Nandini Bhautoo-Dewnarin takes up various aspects of Mistry’s fiction especially Mistry’s reliance on
the traditional technique of realism and the honesty of his imagination. After establishing Mistry’s place amongst the strong sub-continental literary voices that have made a place for themselves in world literature, she talks about Mistry’s choice of Parsi middle class characters living in suburban Bombay. After discussing Mistry’s career as a writer and the various awards conferred upon him from time to time, Dewnarain goes on to discuss the critical responses to Mistry.

The critic evaluates various aspects of Mistry’s fiction like the issue of religious faith among the Parsis, their nostalgia for the past, rights of the minorities in a country like India and a desire amongst the Parsis to migrate to the West for a better future. The critic presents a lucid introduction to Mistry and his works and tries to affirm that Mistry is influenced by the little known but rich tradition of Parsi literature. Although the critic takes note of the fact that Mistry’s works review imperative issues of Indian urban society but evinces that his works are grounded in the Parsi history. In her analysis of A Fine Balance, Dewnarain is all praise for Mistry’s use of realism to present the human stories in a documentary narrative. She declares the novel to be the finest and the most intense of Mistry’s three novels where his concern for the poor, the destitute and the powerless is clearly visible, still Mistry is categorized as a Parsi writer of Indian diaspora because he lives in Canada and the subject of his writing is always the experience of Parsis living in India. The critic tries to assert that although Mistry portrays the Parsi as the ‘other’ in the context of Indian society, his representation of Parsi characters is far from being idealistic. Dewnarain talks about politics in Mistry’s Fiction, the issue of women, family and society, as they are tackled by the writer.

Jagdish Batra in Rohinton Mistry has evaluated many issues raised by the writer. The book debates that despite being the reflection of Parsi life, Mistry’s short stories and novels are quite important as they raise universal human issues. The critic opines that the community
projected in Mistry’s works is Parsi yet this fact does not deprive the stories of their universal character. Batra is of the view that Mistry’s tales may appear quite simple but they deal with the complexities of life. It is established that Parsi world of Mistry’s works is harshly realistic where there is hardly any scope of poetic justice and the concern for society is always evident in these works. The critic feels that the author presents the inadequacies and weaknesses of our socio-political order. The understanding of human relationships and the depiction of modern day Bombay is quite accurate. The book is all praise for Mistry’s “concern for fast eroding value system in individual and public life” (Batra 17).

Apart from these few full length studies, there are some essays and articles written on Rohinton Mistry which are quite relevant to the understanding of his works. There is, for instance, an introductory essay “Situating Rohinton Mistry” in Rohinton Mistry: An Anthology of Recent Criticism, where the editors Anjali Gera Roy and Meena T. Pillai make certain very important observations about Mistry’s works. Apart from the Parsi issues, the issue of class, race and gender are important to Mistry. Not only the socio-political issues of the country, but the city of his birth is also central to his fiction, assert Roy and Pillai. The critics discuss Mistry as a diasporic writer who shifted to Canada but returns to India for themes. What is significant in the analysis of Roy and Pillai is the fact that they do not try to prove that there is an urge, a longing in the diasporic writers to write about their homeland. They argue that the emigrant writer is haunted by the question: “Who will listen to me” (17), and because of this apprehension they are hardly left with any choice but to write about the country of their birth. Moreover, the migrant writer cannot write about the new society, to which he has shifted, because he is not “culturally equipped” (16), to do so.

An important issue of Mistry’s novels being termed as ‘political’ novels is taken up by R.S.Pathak in his essay “Power, politics and Politicians in the Parsi novel.” Pathak establishes an
inseparable relation of literature and contemporary happenings since writers have always revealed political and socio-cultural truths. The critic firmly believes that the Parsis had always limited themselves to non-political professions yet politics and politicians are always discussed in Parsi novels and the Parsi novelists give a Parsi response to political events. The critic defines Mistry’s novels as ‘political’ novels because political events of national significance serve as a background or backdrop and criminalization of politics and political events affecting the lives of common man are the themes of his novels. Pathak quotes Irwing Howe to prove that Mistry’s novels are to be read as political novels because political milieu is the dominant setting in these novels.

Keki N.Daruwala, an eminent Parsi poet in his keynote address at a seminar on Parsi writing organized by Saurashtra University, Rajkot, made certain observations about the Parsi novelists by taking into account the novels written by Bapsi Sidhwa, Boman Desai and Rohinton Mistry and opines that they have a sociological track and a tendency to look back on the city or country they have left behind. Daruwalla praised Mistry for his flavour of reality. However, Daruwalla raised an important issue:

Is this label of Parsi writing necessary? Just because a dozen people from a particular community are writing well, does it mean that we label their literature? Isn’t there around us an efflorescence of fiction writing in India in the English language? Are not Parsi merely a part of this and should their writing be nailed to a sub-nationalistically oriented canon? (83)

It is more than clear that the critics have placed undue emphasis on Mistry being a Parsi novelist. Even the critics who take note of the writer’s historic sense and feel that he is a socio-political novelist read him in the context of a “Parsi milieu.” They discuss his characters as Parsi characters only. This excessive emphasis on his ‘Parsiness’ has led to a serious neglect of an
important component of his fiction -- that it is rooted in a milieu that is entirely urban in character and Mistry’s themes are city themes and his characters are urban middle class people living in modern urban city like Bombay which is rapidly changing. The stress faced by the characters is in fact the stress of social change faced by any Indian middle class character living in modern metros.

Mistry’s fictional world does not portray any ‘Wessex’ of Thomas Hardy or any ‘Malgudy’ of R.K.Narayan. It is Bombay, throbbing and pulsating with life, expanding and becoming modern and ultramodern, more industrialized and more populous facing new changes and challenges every day that Mistry strives to depict. His novels do not take the form of historical fiction but they can definitely be understood as research into history of urban culture. In spite of the fact that literature is not history of the copybook type and Mistry is a novelist and not a historian, his novels give us a true picture of Indian urban society when it started experiencing a new phase of civilization after India gained freedom.

Sociologists establish that society which is “the system of social relationships” is “incessantly changeful” (Maclever and Page 518) and “tension” is “an inalienable aspect of social change” (Singh 184). Mistry depicts these changing patterns of social life and the associated stress in his works. The fast changing life of Bombay captured Mistry’s attention because he had spent an ‘impressionable’ part of his life in this city. Directly or indirectly, almost all his short stories and novels refer to the changes in Indian urban culture and the anxieties associated with these changes. Nowhere does he claim that he gives the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth but he has presented a very truthful record of urban society of India after independence. Since Mistry was deeply influenced by social and political changes and as he writes about post-independence India, we cannot understand him without knowing something about the changes taking place in the country after its freedom.
The second half of 20th Century in Indian history is marked by complexity and disturbance. Political changes of a momentous character took place in India in 1940s, the most important being the abdication of power and authority in India by the British with the grant of virtual Independence to the country in August 1947. It is interesting to note that the changes that the British wanted to bring in Indian society but could not, despite best efforts, were introduced in the brief period since India became independent. Another important fact in the history of modern India was the adoption of a new constitution on 26 January 1950.

The traditional Indian society has always believed in the difference of caste and class, gender and race. Strangely discriminatory actions have always been the part and parcel of our social structure. Minimizing these social inequalities and thereby bringing about social justice was perhaps the most challenging goal set before the newly formed Government of Independent India. The institutional structure of the post-colonial Indian state is by and large embedded in libertarian principles as well as the socialist principles of equality. The constitution that was adopted by our country guarantees individual and collective freedom of religion and lays down that there should be no discrimination of any kind on the basis of caste, gender and religion. After independence, many Legislation regarding reforms in the customs of marriage, inheritance, untouchability, etc. were made and secularism was declared the national policy of the country. The educational, economic, and political policies adopted by free India gave new opportunities to people and this brought about changes that were unheard of. The rights given by the constitution ensured a process of secularization of Indian social life.

The attainment of freedom and progress of democracy were not the only dominant features which affected life in different ways, the changes brought about in Indian social life by urbanization and industrialization were equally important. With sudden growth of cities and towns, improved means of communication and transport, technological advancement in every
field, the contours of Indian landscape were being redefined. With the passage of time, the process of secularization became increasingly wider and deeper.

Before independence, only the elite class had access to education and this educated community represented the brain and conscience of the country. The few educated Indians were the legitimate spokesmen of the illiterate masses and they were considered to be natural custodians of their interests. The spread of education became the main concern of our political leaders after attainment of freedom. In fact, the modernization of India would not have been possible without significant changes in education system. The period after independence was marked by a strong wave of reforming activities in religion and society and the credit goes to the education policies adopted by the Government. It is important to note that not only was the process of modernization initiated by the Government through education policies, the desire for modern education also increased in people and this resulted in a great social upheaval. In *A Fine Balance*, Dina symbolizes this desire to get education. The assertion of rights is expressed by Narayan and the other Dalits when they get determined to cast their votes.

It was expected that the human rights conferred on Indian citizens by the constitution would bring about radical changes in the socio-economic structures assuring every citizen, irrespective of his or her class, caste, gender etc., equal membership in the political community. Little did our policy makers realize that such big dreams can’t be realized so easily and the mindset is not a thing to be changed overnight. For a state in which people were neither accustomed nor educated to live with democracy, the actual implementation of these laws was far from being easy. This is what Mistry always depicts in his works. He authenticates how gender bias accounts for some of the most severe forms of inequalities witnessed in Indian society and how gender oppression occurs in a plurality of sites including home. But while he depicts the son preference of Indian society, he also records the efforts made by women to end
the era of discrimination and subordination. The fact that urban females are quite influenced by
the spirit of change is presented in the character of Kashmira in “The Paying Guest”, Daulat in

Another important feature in the social history of modern India is the slow but sure
improvement in the condition of Dalits, who, like the women of our country, are waking from
the age old slumber to a new consciousness. Details of this awakening and its consequences are
attested by Mistry in *A Fine Balance*. The novel narrates that new hopes have been generated in
these circles after independence and also exposes the continuity of the old exploiting system of
society which doesn’t afford the opportunities to the untouchables despite the rights given to
them by the Indian constitution.

After 1947, India made significant progress in the field of industries and a period of rapid
urbanization began with a process of industrialization. This speedy industrialization and
urbanization led to the modernization of culture. Despite the continuity of traditional cultural
values and institutions in the cities, urbanization gave a severe jolt to the traditional cultural
norms. The contact and interaction between people of various castes and cultures was bound to
bring about changes in thinking and philosophy. In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry duly highlights the
phenomenon of migration, the problems of migrants and consequences of interaction among
various castes and classes of society.

In 19th century, the great thinkers, reformers and social activists had thought that the
contact of the Indian society with the West will be the source of cultural and moral redemption
for India. They could not have imagined that a time will come when Indian society will imitate
the Western values in toto and the rich Indian culture will be totally lost and Indians will become
slaves to the westernized attitudes towards life. The adoption of western culture by younger
generation and the hurt of those who respect and adore the old Indian culture is portrayed by Rohinton Mistry in his fiction.

Apart from the cultural changes, Mistry has faithfully put before us the frustration and hurt of people who are affected by these changes. The author seems to concede that modern urban society is becoming hostile to whatever is positive in human nature. The ever growing depravation and emptiness of urban life in the city is projected by the writer in a number of ways. Since Mistry came to terms with the basic thrust of social change, he succeeds in giving us the impression that his depiction of this change is both authentic and objective. He is able to see both sides of the picture and never loses sight of the fact that there are some positive aspects of city life as it can provide numerous opportunities and the lucky ones like Vikram Kapur in *Family Matters* can boast of stories of rags to riches. The shackles of caste and creed have been watered down to a great extent in these urban environs and distinct possibilities for independent living for women exist in modern cities like Bombay. But the overall impression of the urban society is far from being positive.

The characters in Mistry’s works are not superhumans but mostly the lower middle class Parsis having moderate aspirations. It needs mention that these characters are not to be seen as merely individuals. Although Mistry is deeply attached to his Parsi community, nowhere does he show his Parsi characters to be better human beings than the rest of the society. If characters like Gustad and Nariman belong to the Parsi community, the same community has produced characters like Coomy and Nusswan. Without being sentimental, the educated Parsi characters are sometimes shown to be inferior human beings by the author. Mistry’s fictional world is occupied by characters from the young generation as well as the old and generally their ideology towards life and corresponding worldviews do not match. In one of his interviews, Mistry
commented: “I must write about what I know best” (qtd. in Supriya, 80). Thus, most of his characters, happen to be Parsis and the locale is generally Bombay -- the city of his birth.

Bombay, the business capital of India, lures and accommodates people from all parts of the country and has become a unique society because of the interaction of various classes. The impact of globalization is seen on the lives of people here, social norms and conventions are continuously being challenged and the influence of the West on the people is quite visible. Through his chosen characters and chosen locale, Mistry has always highlighted the impact of modernization and urbanization on contemporary Indian social life. In A Fine Balance and The Scream, Mistry doesn’t assign any name to the city he depicts. The decision speaks of the writer’s understanding that life in all big cities, irrespective of their names, remains the same.

Published in 1987, Tales from Firozsha Baag consists of eleven short stories, each dealing with one or the other aspect of life of Parsis living in Firozsha Baag -- a typical Parsi enclave. Although complete in itself, each story carries inter-references and an impression of connectedness is created. The reader gets detailed information about the close-knit Parsi community and its efforts to preserve their ethnic identity. Not only does Mistry present the Parsis being conscious of their elite status but also talks about their decreasing importance in the society after independence of the country. If Mistry talks about the Parsis’ reputation for honesty and their deep faith in Zoroastrian values, he does not shy away from highlighting their prejudices and idiosyncrasies. Most of the characters in these short stories belong to lower middle strata of the society and are embodiments of the ordinariness of existence. The stories entertain the readers as well as raise some very serious issues confronting the modern man living in modern metropolitan cities like Bombay. The world presented in Tales from Firozsha Baag does not showcase any Forest of Arden where love reigns supreme and troubles don’t trouble you. It is the post-independence urban world where hopes raised by freedom and democracy are
beginning to crumble. Characterized by mild political interference and bearable stress of domestic life, the tales in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* still project a simple world of very ordinary people living in Firozsha Baag.

With *Such A Long Journey*, Mistry got established as a writer who takes up serious issues of life in his fiction. Read from a Parsi perspective, the novel is concerned with the experiences of Parsis in post-independence India. On another level, it is the story of an ordinary middle class man who finds it difficult to make both ends meet yet cherishes high hopes of social mobility. From being a localized Parsi story, the novel moves on to the larger national issues like poverty, corruption in Indian politics and the situation of country during the days of Emergency. The novel documents that the conditions of living are becoming disturbing. One is shocked to see the old humanistic ideals of brotherhood missing from the society. The writer posits that the conditions of human existence in a modern big city are devoid of all charm. The efforts of an individual to preserve dignity and self respect are thwarted. All the major characters experience many types of stress and anxiety in the novel.

Set in mid 1970s, *A Fine Balance* narrates the challenges posed by the contemporary conditions of living in a big city. It is a horrifying world on many parameters. A sensitive reader is bound to feel terrified by the emptiness of modern life. In this novel, we come across the reality of our times where the individual is grappling with the erosion of values across the board. Highlighting many atrocities of emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975, *A Fine Balance* narrates the story of four characters from different backgrounds who come together just by chance but develop a unique bond with each other. The two dalits, Ishvar and Omprakash are from the rural background who come to Bombay in search of job. Maneck, the boy from small mountain village in north India comes to the city for his education. Dina, a Parsi widow, living all alone and managing her life in her own independent way hires the tailors and takes Maneck as
her paying guest to generate more income. Slowly and gradually the four form a kind of ‘family’. Through the story of Omprakash and Ishvar, the problem of caste ridden Indian society and the assertion of the dalits is shown by the writer. Dina’s story is the story of struggle of a woman in the male dominated Indian society. The clash of old and new gets reflected through the conflict between Maneck and his father.

In *Family Matters*, Mistry gives us a feel of India of the 1990s. The bigger canvas of *A Fine Balance* involving various castes and classes of society shrinks again and once again we are in the Parsi world. The desire to portray the rural world or hill areas is gone and the *amchi Mumbai*, as usual, is the fictional locale of the novel. Like the other two novels of Mistry, *Family Matters* contains a political subtext - the growth of fundamentalist Hindutva ideology and Shiv Sena’s interference in the life of a common man. The reader cannot afford to ignore the importance of the political subtext as it makes the novel a narrative of the contemporary Indian urban society in its transitional state on many parameters. However, the novel, as the title suggests, discusses the family matters for the most part.

The sensitive issue of old age is detailed with utmost sensitivity by the novelist. The book provides an inside view of the relationship of an old man with his family. The complete world of family is represented through Nariman’s association with his children and grandchildren. The reader notices that the relationship of the grandchildren with their grandfather does not carry any materialistic texture but the association of the grownups is devoid of care and concern for the old man except that of Roxana. The attitudes of Coomy and Jal make it clear that their association with their father borders on nullity, being based on economic considerations. *Family Matters* is Mistry’s anguished commentary on the staleness of family relationships in modern day urban society. One feels hurt to see the rotten picture of Indian family system where there is no love lost between the family members. It is not without serious reasons that Rohinton Mistry has
titled his third novel as *Family Matters*. The novel discusses the role of family in one’s life and also defines the place of parents in the lives of modern children. Apart from Parsi issues, Mistry studies the impact of modern forces on family as an institution.

The concern for old people is hardly new in Mistry, but it becomes the sole concern of his last novel, *The Scream*. His fundamental commitment to the cause of old people is always visible in his works and the last novel deals with the universal issue pertaining to their social neglect, frustration and stress. The novel establishes the belief that in vain do we boast of our country being a place where parents are almost worshipped. He reveals that the environment in urban homes has become morally so corrupt that family members have lost their will to serve the old members in the family and they don’t even feel any guilt for being heartless. The novel discovers how the old people, who deserve a lot of pity, care and sympathy, lead a life of total neglect in big city homes. Lodged in a separate room, holed in a situation which is utterly frustrating, longing for good food, human consideration and human company, the protagonist is treated with abject apathy and insensitivity by his family. The soul-killing seclusion has made him so restless that he seems to have lost his mental balance. Maddened by his age, his diseases and the demeaning, alienating and dehumanizing practices adopted by his family members, the unnamed old man feels totally neglected. Although the reader is not expected to take the statements of the old man on their face value, but what the writer wants the readers to feel is a need of care and concern for the old man.

As part of his observations, Mistry has realized the historic dimension of social formations. He knows that society is not a rigid structure but a complex of activities undergoing continuous change. Equally important is the understanding of the writer that the process of change is quite complicated and painful. Mistry not only refers to the outward changes that were taking place in the society but also mirrors the pain and misery involved in the whole process. As
a great observer of life, Rohinton Mistry knows that the stress of social change is always felt disproportionately on the marginalized sections of society, so he has taken up the issue of women, untouchables, Parsis and old people in his fiction.

It is important to note that Mistry not only depicts the broad contours of the changes taking place in urban society but also renders, with accuracy, each important stage of the whole process of change. A comparison of the novels will show that urban society has been transformed in many important ways in the time span of a few decades after independence. Mistry has faithfully put before us the entire process clearly demarcating each distinctive phase of this process. The first publication, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* marks the first phase of changes in urban society. These short stories do not project a much westernized Bombay. The simple tales narrate commonplace family situations where women and children are not very assertive. Though mild tensions between the old and new are scattered here and there, but generation gap has not acquired a serious connotation and the parents are not ignored by their children. The family members are not shown to be indulging in intrigues and plots against each other and the authority of the parents is not questioned in these short stories. As we move from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* to *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* which project the world of the 1970s, there is a remarkable change in the attitude of women, in the attitude of children towards their parents and in the general attitude of society towards vital issues of life. The relationship between brothers and sisters are not positive at all and parents and children enter into serious conflicts. The change in the structure of families and the degradation caused by different phenomena of modern life has assumed seriousness in *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*.

The situation is alarming and needs immediate address in *Family Matters* that projects the Indian urban society of the 1990s. Mistry makes it very clear that we are sitting on a volcano. Not only are the urban experiences highly depressing for the common man, the domestic world,
too, is in the final stage of its disintegration. Modern Indian women are shown to be quite dominating and calculative and the novel rings warning bells for our senior citizens. Apart from the disturbances caused by the urbanization and industrialization, Mistry has also depicted the changes in thinking and outlook brought about by westernization and modernization. Thus, Family Matters depicts quite an advanced stage of social change and mirrors a substantial loss of our rich Indian culture. *The Scream* depicts an extreme stage of collapse of values in domestic sphere. In fact, the shocking information regarding the old man’s sleeping place and the lack of facilities in his room is symbolic of a serious social issue – the growing ghettoization of senior citizens in the society and in their own homes. The unnamed old man maybe perceived not as an individual but a voice of the people of old age rendered helpless. The attitude of the members of his family is symbolic of the general attitude of the abler members in the family towards the aged. The novel expresses Mistry’s idea that family can not only ‘compensate’ for many things, it can also be a wellspring of exploitation. The unwillingness to comprehend the needs and the failure to provide the essential care to the old man speaks of the disintegration of the family as an institution in the country. *The Scream*, thus, can be viewed as Mistry’s critique on the neglect of old age in modern times.

Thus, Mistry takes serious note of the negative aspects of the march of modernization and communicates that life in big cities often produces unbearable emotional and psychological pressure on individuals. The frustration and depression in the lives of all major characters depicted by Mistry prove that the unhealthy features of the western world have become an integral part of life in urban areas of our country. The world of these metros sometimes appears very gloomy where what makes life worth living is found wanting. Mistry has given a very balanced and perceptive assessment of the burdens caused by massive social change and Mistry feels most of the things “on his pulses”, to borrow a phrase from John Keats.
An attempt is being made in the present study to demonstrate that it is imperative to see Mistry’s novels in relation to the changes taking place in the society. Once we recognize this intimate connection between Mistry’s works and the historical developments in the post-independence period, we shall find that Mistry is an important writer because he is one of the most authentic and honest observers of the social scene and his novels have great significance as social documents. Even if the novels do not offer a mechanical and statistical account of what was happening, they give us the historical truth by an imaginative rendering of the actual experiences of the people in urban areas who bore the brunt of a momentous social change that took place in the course of the later half of 20th century. The discussion of Mistry’s short stories and the novels will be taken up in separate chapters to investigate how Mistry takes up the issue of those who are adversely affected by the inescapable process of change.

The second chapter aims to study the impact of social change in the world of women and untouchables in India. The third chapter seeks to analyse how the concept of generation gap is changing its meaning in modern times and how the parents feel unbearable anxiety on account of the changing attitudes of their children. The fourth chapter examines Mistry’s understanding of stress of social change on family as an institution. The author showcases the role of family in conventional Indian setup and the character of family in metropolitan culture. This chapter brings out, through a discussion of Mistry’s short stories and novels, the precise extent to which the westernized attitude of family members have marginalized the old members in modern urban families. The fifth chapter is devoted to the discussion of urban experiences in modern times where the shattering effect of monotony-ridden, demanding, impersonal, unfeeling and soul-denying atmosphere of modern cities is seen on the psyche of a sensitive individual. The last chapter of the thesis aims to sum up the observations made in the course of the study.